

# **Reviewers' Evaluation for Public Charter School Application**

## **PERIDOT MONTESSORI CHARTER SCHOOL**

September 30, 2015

Review Team: Nichi Farnham, (Chair), John Bird and Laurie Pendleton

### **A. Education Plan**

#### **A.1. Mission, Vision, Identification of targeted student population and the community the school hopes to serve**

##### Strengths

- The well-respected Montessori-style education is currently provided at 3 locations in the county- pre- Kindergarten. The application proposes to carry on Montessori-centered teaching and fill a need in the Ellsworth area in grades K through grade 8.
- The Montessori based teaching is strengthened by connecting it with STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Math)
- The proposed Montessori Compass Program has 3000 lessons.

##### Questions, Concerns

- The 5 to 10 year plan for the Peridot, Ellsworth, Maine Charter school was not fully thought through. The mission and vision as they apply to creating a charter school under Maine law is incomplete.
- It is unclear how will customization occur.

#### **A.2. Academic Program**

##### Strengths

- Continuing the Montessori teaching philosophy beyond kindergarten.
- Program description encompasses the many attractive aspects of the Montessori approach
- STEAM = STEM with a rich dose of creativity

#### Questions, Concerns

- The proposed Compass Program focuses on Infant to age 12, the proposed school includes 13-14 year olds. Although not written about clearly in the application, the plan for the grades 7 and 8 was talked about somewhat during the interview.
- The curriculum centered on Compass was not fully -aligned to Maine Learning Results. An approach for completing the alignment was shared during the interview.
- Although the application states the Montessori approach is aligned to the Common Core standards, it does not indicate how it is aligned to Maine's Science and Social Studies standards.
- The web link provided in the application for the Compass program provides little useful information.
- The application does not provide a clear picture of how the academic program will be implemented.

### **A.3. Special Student Populations**

#### Strengths

- Montessori teaching lends itself to working with the special student population.
- Montessori philosophy, with its emphasis on individually tailored lesson plans, is a natural fit for working with students with special needs.

#### Questions, Concerns

- Although a plan for working with the Special Student Population was included in the application, the plan was not based on MUSER (Maine Unified Special Education Regulations) - it seemed to be based on another state's regulations.
- In the application, students requiring special services were not included in the proposed budget; this was explained during the interview.

### **A.4. Assessment**

#### Strengths

- The Montessori Compass program would help track progress.
- An aligned curriculum makes teaching to the test unnecessary.
- Progress report is comprehensive.

### Questions, Concerns

- The application did not address the State of Maine assessment requirements.
- Will use Compass to track student progress, but little is said about how they will use this data to support student academic growth.
- The sample scope and sequence provided in the assessment subsection includes Spanish. Will the school be offering Spanish? How do these topics relate to Maine Learning Results?

## **A.5. School Climate and Discipline**

### Strengths

- One basic rule = Each person in the school is expected to respect themselves, others and the environment.
- Peace rose/ talking stick approach to resolving conflict.
- Use of natural and logical consequences.
- Children are expected to take responsibility for their actions.

### Questions, Concerns

- These two sections (School Climate and Discipline) were repetitive.

## **Education Plan Summary**

Is the Education Plan compelling? Are we convinced that the applicant make a strong case for the quality of the program? Describe why or why not.

- Montessori program is interesting, but this application does not provide enough information or supporting documentation to show how it aligns with Maine Learning Results and Maine Law.

Does the Education Plan support the vision and mission of the school? Describe why or why not.

- Yes but again, not under the tenets of Maine law
- It might. The plan does not provide enough detail to know if it can be successfully implemented.

## B. Organizational Plan

### B.1. School Calendar and Daily Schedule

#### Strengths

- The summer extended-learning opportunities are a plus.
- The after school opportunities are a positive offering.
- Daily schedule lives out the Montessori philosophy in practice.

#### Questions, Concerns

- None noted

### B.2. Student Recruitment and Enrollment

#### Strengths

- Evidence of probable demand for a K-8 Montessori-based charter school - there are currently PreK-K Montessori schools in the area.

#### Questions, Concerns

- The plan for gathering students does not ensure equal access to all interested students and families who live in the catchment area.
- Lottery proposal for two-three year-olds is impermissible under Maine law.
- No evidence of community outreach to see if 151 students in year one is viable.
- Assumptions are high for homeschoolers without evidence that there are that many home school students in Hancock County.

### B.3. Staffing and Human Resources

#### Strengths

- Comprehensive handbook
- Annual written evaluation for teachers
- Effectiveness gauge
- Proposed teacher training institute in the future
- Executive Director already on board

<u>Questions, Concerns</u>
----------------------------

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A school should have everything it needs to provide a top-notch program in place from the start. Peridot cannot guarantee it will have credentialed Montessori or special education-certified teachers in year one.</li><li>• Administration thin at beginning (e.g., executive director will run business office)</li></ul> |
|--|

#### **B.4. Pre-Opening Plan**

<u>Strengths</u>
------------------

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• None noted</li></ul> |
|--|

<u>Questions, Concerns</u>
----------------------------

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• None noted</li></ul> |
|--|

#### **B.5. Management and Operation**

<u>Strengths</u>
------------------

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Covered under Staffing and Human Resources</li></ul> |
|--|

<u>Questions, Concerns</u>
----------------------------

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Covered under Staffing and Human Resources</li></ul> |
|--|

#### **B.6. Community Development**

<u>Strengths</u>
------------------

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• None noted</li></ul> |
|--|

<u>Questions, Concerns</u>
----------------------------

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The application could have been clearer on how the parents at the Peridot Montessori, Ellsworth, Maine Charter School will be involved versus the example used in the application.</li></ul> |
|--|

## Management and Operations Summary

Are we convinced that the school has an effective plan to recruit, retain and grow an outstanding staff? Describe why or why not.

- The long-term plan looks solid (especially like the teacher training institute concept), but the staffing plan for year one is a concern.
- Not convinced they will be able to find certified Montessori teachers.

Does the Management and Operations Plan support the vision and mission of the school? Describe why or why not.

- Not convinced the school can deliver a top-notch Montessori program without Montessori-trained and experienced teachers from the beginning.

## C. Governance

### C. 1. Governing Body

#### Strengths

- None noted

#### Questions, Concerns

- The concept of a foundation in anticipation of overseeing a teacher training institute and other long-term initiatives does not justify putting it in place to oversee the school = should have a traditional board in place for this governance role.

### C. 2. Governing Board Composition

#### Strengths

- Clearly have attracted community people deeply committed to the school's mission and vision.

#### Questions, Concerns

- Board lacks philanthropic firepower, which is a significant problem, given the school's funding needs.

## Governance Summary

Are we convinced that the Board members and Executive Leadership have the skills, background and understanding of their roles necessary to make this a viable and sustainable public charter school? Describe why or why not.

- Excessive reliance on the founding executive director, who wrote the application and dominated the answering of questions during the interview, suggests that board members may lack the diversity of skills needed to oversee the school.

Does the Governance Plan support the vision and mission of the school? Describe why or why not.

- No comments

## D. Business and Financial Services

### D. 1. Budget

#### Strengths

- The Stanwood Foundation/community seems supportive.
- Solid norms for expense categories (i.e., 55% for staff expenses, etc.)
- Keeping before- and after-school and summer camp books separate (i.e., make them self-sufficient programs)

#### Questions, Concerns

- Fund-raising plan is creative but unconvincing as a means to producing significant philanthropic income.
- The net budget surplus does not seem realistic in year one, especially given assumptions on grants and other forms of philanthropy.
- Anticipates special needs students but does not budget for a special education teacher in year one.
- Need to secure building could put the budget at risk.

### D.2. Financial Management

#### Strengths

- Emphasizes the need for comprehensive transparency

<u>Questions, Concerns</u>
----------------------------

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The separation of financial duties as required by GAAP was talked through during the interview, but was not documented well in the proposed application.</li><li>• The budget in the application assumed grants would be successfully awarded.</li><li>• The Special Education Student line was left blank in the budget provided in the application. This “budget approach” was explained during the interview.</li></ul> |
|--|

### **D. 3. Facilities**

<u>Strengths</u>
------------------

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The three-pronged approach to securing a facility, with a likelihood of accomplishing Plan A, the preferred alternative.</li></ul> |
|--|

<u>Questions, Concerns</u>
----------------------------

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• None noted</li></ul> |
|--|

### **D. 4. Transportation**

<u>Strengths</u>
------------------

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• None noted</li></ul> |
|--|

<u>Questions, Concerns</u>
----------------------------

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• None noted</li></ul> |
|--|

### **D.5. Insurance**

<u>Strengths</u>
------------------

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Included in application</li></ul> |
|---|

<u>Questions, Concerns</u>
----------------------------

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• None noted</li></ul> |
|--|



## D. 6. Food Service

<u>Strengths</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• On paper a good overall program.</li></ul>
<u>Questions, Concerns</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• None noted</li></ul>

## D. 7. Closure Protocol

<u>Strengths</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Included in application</li></ul>
<u>Questions, Concerns</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Weak closure plan</li></ul>

## Business and Financial Services Summary

<p>Are we convinced that the applicant has operating capital adequate to open the school and for the first years of operation and have a viable sustainable model for the next five years? Describe why or why not.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Beyond the per-student funding from the state, much of the budget income is based on estimates for which the groundwork has not been convincingly established.</li></ul>
<p>Does the Finance Plan support the vision and mission of the school? Describe why or why not.</p> <p>No :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Presentation of the budget made it very difficult to follow.</li><li>• Budget was based on many unknowns.</li><li>• Lack of a significant fund raising plan.</li></ul>

## E. Education Service Providers

*Not Applicable*

### Application Summary

Are you convinced that this is a unique viable model that will meet the needs of the students it wishes to serve? Describe why or why not.

- No. While the Montessori model is a proven one educationally across the country, the applicant fails to address the requirements of Maine law in several areas. However, I would strongly favor urging the applicant to resubmit the application next year, provided the concerns expressed in this report are addressed.

- Overall Assessment: Would you recommend this application for further consideration by the Commission? We recommend that the Maine Charter School Commission not move this applicant forward to the Public Interview and Hearing phase of the process.

Recommendation:

Deny

Approve